



PHOTOS BY RALF BEINENZ AND JEFF STEIN

Collecting 120: How to Sell a Watch

In previous installments of this series we have provided general advice for collectors (Collecting 101, International Watch, February 2005) and given some pointers on How to Buy a Watch (Collecting 110, International Watch, June and September 2005). In this next course, Collecting 120, we move to what might be the most difficult and emotionally charged aspect of collecting—selling watches.

Watch collectors love to buy watches. Watch collectors also love to talk about watches, read about watches, touch watches and even wind, polish and listen to their watches. But mention the phrase “sell a watch” to many collectors and a look of abject horror will wash across their faces, as if you have renounced the religion of “collecting”.

Our premise is that, despite the initial shock and revulsion at the thought of selling a watch, selling is in fact a healthy undertaking that

can greatly enhance your collecting experience. We believe that serious collectors should develop a thoughtful approach to selling watches, just as they develop an approach to buying them, and that selling can often facilitate the buying.

So if you are willing to entertain the idea that selling a watch is not a criminal offense, let’s walk through the process and see how it might actually help you enjoy the collecting experience. It may not be as pleasurable as touching, winding, wearing, displaying and polish-

ing the watches, but once you have developed the right approach to selling, you may even enjoy selling a watch (or two).

Making the Decision to Sell

Some portfolio managers are of the view that an investor should look at his stock portfolio every day and ask himself whether he would make the same decision to purchase each stock in his portfolio that day. In other words, rather than sticking with the status quo of continuing to hold whatever stocks happen

Tell the Story. As a successor to the Breitling Navitimers, this Sinn 903 has some interesting history. If you can tell the story, your bidders will often be willing to pay for this information.



to be in your portfolio, ask yourself whether you would make the affirmative decision to purchase each of these stocks that day. The punch line to this analysis is that, transaction costs aside, by maintaining the status quo, you are in effect buying each of the stocks in your portfolio every day that you continue own them.

This same frame of reference might apply to your watch collection. Review your collection from time to time and ask yourself, "If this one came onto the market today at a reasonable price, would I buy it?" In this sense, continuing to hold the watches in your collection is akin to repurchasing the watches each day that you own them. Unless you have an unlimited budget for your collection, maintaining watches in your portfolio amounts to purchasing the watches, as doing so will restrict your ability to purchase other watches.

Most collectors will enjoy selling a watch because this will enable them to purchase another watch that they will enjoy more. Just as you should consider whether a particular stock is likely to provide the highest rate of return, so you should ask yourself whether a particular watch is providing you with the greatest enjoyment as a collector, or whether there is another one that you are likely to enjoy more. Making this "trade" will add to your pleasure and help you keep the total cost of your collection within the same budget.

Prepare the watch for sale

Prior to listing your watch for sale, you should check the watch carefully to be certain that it is working properly and keeping accurate time. It would be very disappointing to have an auction underway, or even



Play the Angles. When shooting the photos for your listing, play the angles to highlight the most attractive features of your watch—like the brushed finish on the case, and the mint bezel, dial and hands of this Heuer Autavia diver chrono.

have the watch sold, only to find out that there is a mechanical problem. Check the winding, setting, running accuracy and power reserve, as well as any complications or special features (chronograph, date or calendar, moonphase, dual display).

If you find that your watch requires a repair, you may face a difficult decision in determining whether you will undertake the repair or sell the watch "as is." Generally, a watch listed for sale with any sort of problem will be discounted by considerably more than the cost of the repair. A watch might require a relatively inexpensive servicing or adjustment. For a purchaser to buy a watch "as is" or that is not running burdens the purchaser with the risk and trouble of repair, and this risk will generally involve a significant reduction in the price of the watch.

Select your market

Now that you have broken through

the barrier of deciding to sell a watch, you will need to select the best market for your watch. Before the Internet, your choices would have been very limited—sell to a jewelry store or dealer, travel to a watch show or advertise in an enthusiasts' magazine. Now, your computer serves as your gateway to an enormous worldwide market in which you can sell almost any watch for a reasonable price in a matter of days (or even hours). While there are several channels on the Internet, eBay has become the largest marketplace for collectible watches. On a given day, dozens of watches will be bought and sold, for each of the major brands.

Still, for those who are not familiar with eBay, this modern-day auction process will appear to be something of a maze, requiring registration, credit card information, numerous steps to produce a listing, and anonymous bidders who are of-

ten registered in distant places.

If eBay or other online auction sites are not attractive, many sellers will consider websites for watch enthusiasts that have forums or classified listings where watches can be bought and sold. Listings at these sites are usually easier to produce than for eBay, the atmosphere is friendlier and the technical (and legal) requirements are less intimidating.

You may be able to use these sites to sell your watch at a fixed price, to seek the “best offer” over a stated amount or to structure your own style of auction. An alternative to eBay or Internet listings will be selling to a dealer who operates a vintage watch website. While you will be selling into the “wholesale”

market rather than at full retail, you may be able to realize a reasonable price based on a quick phone call, without the tedium of an eBay or website listing.

Set your price

There are two key steps in determining the price at which you will sell your watch—determining the fair market value of the watch and making the decision about whether you will actually seek to realize that price.

Determining the market value of a watch is often the easy part. You can get reliable information about the value of your watch by tracking recent sales on eBay, checking the dealer sites, seeking information



No Surprises Yes, this Glashütte pilots chronograph shows some age, but by providing an accurate description of your watch and honest photographs, you increase the likelihood of a successful sale.



GMT Dull and GMT Dramatic

Photography Sells. Compare the dark “head-shot” of this Heuer Autavia GMT, seen below, with the brighter shot from an interesting angle, above, and you can see how good photography will improve the results of your sales.



through watch discussion forums, or checking in a variety of published price guides.

The more difficult part may be deciding whether you will actually seek the highest price that the market may offer or whether some external factors may lead you to “settle” for some lower price. Collectors tend to form communities with other col-

lectors, and you will need to decide whether you are seeking the top dollar for your watch or whether you will be happier selling to one of your friends (or, as often, a friend of a friend), at some sort of friendly price. Yes, there may be some lost profit in accepting this “friendly price”, but you will often be rewarded when a member of your community is kind enough to return the favor.

How and when to sell

Assuming that you have determined that you will sell your watch on eBay, you will face the decision of whether to set a reserve or whether to sell the watch on a “no reserve” basis. Some bidders are more enthusiastic about no reserve auctions. They know that the watch will be sold, and they may believe they have a better chance to win it. As a seller, there are some factors that you should consider before opting for a no reserve auction. Consider

whether there is a broad enough following for your watch, which will more likely generate an efficient market with a broad range of bidders. In such a case, you may be willing to take the risks of a no reserve auction. On the other hand, if you are selling a relatively scarce watch that will be of interest only to a relatively small group of enthusiasts, you may want to have the protection of a reserve. For the rare watches, it is not unusual to have only two or three serious bidders. If one of those bidders doesn’t find your auction, has computer problems, is away on vacation or is short of money at the moment, it may be difficult for you to realize a satisfactory price.

In terms of when to sell your watch, you should consider whether there are seasonal factors that could affect your sale. If you are selling a relatively scarce watch, and are worried that there may not be sufficient interest among the collectors, you may want to avoid holiday seasons when some portion of these bidders are likely to be at the beach (and away from their computers). Some watches may sell particularly well in the fall when people are beginning to think about holiday gifts. There may be more demand for other watches in the spring, when people are looking for gifts for graduations, weddings or anniversaries, or for travel watches.

There are two words of advice for anyone selling a watch through the Internet: photography sells!

Whether it’s the excitement of seeing a dramatic photo of your watch or the confidence that your purchaser will have from seeing a detailed photograph of a pristine dial or movement, most collectors would agree that a seller can earn a considerable premium by displaying



Show Your Stuff. A vintage watch with the original bracelet, box, instructions, guarantee and hang-tag will always command a premium. If you've got it, flaunt it!

the best quality photographs of his watch. On the other hand, photographs that are out of focus or do not show detail or accurate colors will often result in your watch selling at a steep discount.

How much information should you provide in describing your watch? Generally, purchasers will like to see a full-bodied description of your watch that will include such essentials as the condition (dial, case and movement), any known service

history or recent overhauls, and dimensions. It is also important to indicate whether the watch is running well and, for watches with complications, whether these function properly. The time invested in crafting a more thorough description of your watch will pay dividends in higher bids and will save you the time required to answer questions from prospective purchasers.

Most sellers would agree that you could increase your chances of



Abercrombie & Fitch Seafarer

High-resolution photos will allow your bidders to be confident about the watch's condition; minor "freckles" and patina will serve to confirm that dial and hands are original.

selling a watch at a favorable price by including some background and history on your watch. When was it produced? In what quantity? Was there any special history of this particular model or variation (for example, was it one of the first produced or one of the last)? You can make your listing more informative (and perhaps entice a seller) by including references to authoritative sources that describe your brand of watch, its

mechanical features or other special attributes. As you derive information from these sources, however, you should be careful not to "borrow" images or wording without the permission of the author. To do so is wrong; it could also cause prospective bidders to question your integrity.

Beyond this general history, consider whether you have some interesting story about your watch that may make it more appealing to buy-

ers. For instance, was it put away by Grandpa fifty years ago, is it a one-owner watch from the 1970s or is it engraved to mark a special event in someone's life? Realize, however, that there is such a thing as information overload and there will be prospective buyers who only want to know the basics and will not want to wade through a lengthy listing looking for the basic information they seek.

You may also want to consider whether additional information that you may be providing in your listing is likely to increase the chances of selling your watch or, in the rare case, detract from your efforts. While many would say that it is always best to provide all available information, realize that there is some chance that a prospective purchaser will find something unappealing in the information. The same may be true for data regarding the watch's performance. Some buyers may be impressed that a fifty-year-old watch is accurate to within thirty seconds per day. To others, this may sound problematic. One approach is to have this information at hand, but provide it only when asked, rather than providing it in the listing for your sale.

In "Collecting 120 – Part Two" we will consider the remaining steps of selling your watch—managing the auction, concluding the sale, receiving payment and shipping and insurance. ☺

Chuck Maddox collects modern and vintage chronographs and hosts his own site of articles at <http://home.xnet.com/~cmaddox/cm3articles.html>.

Jeff Stein collects vintage chronographs and is the creator of www.OnTheDash.com, an online guide to Heuer chronographs.